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Canada

A time to listen, a time to act

Notes for an address by
The Honourable Rob Nicholson, P.C., Q.C.,
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

during the launch of

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week 2007

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Thank you for that kind introduction. It gives me great pleasure to take part in today's events and to mark the beginning of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. All this week, communities across Canada will stage gatherings to spread the word about the impacts of crime on victims and to discuss effective approaches to assisting victims.

Organizers have chosen a worthy theme for this year's events: "It's time to listen." I believe the theme is closely linked to what Canadians must do to address victims' issues.

The effects of crime are significant on society, and tremendous effort goes into investigating, prosecuting and punishing criminals, resulting in individuals and taxpayers paying hundreds of millions of dollars.

For far too long, however, very little attention had been paid to our victims of crime. Victims have long felt that they don't have a voice, and cannot be heard, in our criminal justice system. They don't believe they have the necessary support and assistance as they follow their journey for justice.

Our government believes too that it is time to listen. We have heard our victims, we have seen our victims, and we know it's time to respect our victims. And that is why we have made some proud steps forward in recent months.

By know that by listening to victims, we learn more about the often devastating impacts of crime. It also enables us to provide them with the support they need.

Victims and victims' families are often devastated by the criminal acts they have experienced. Yet they can feel further victimized by elements of a justice system which seems to focus almost entirely on the criminal.

Canada 's New Government has delivered on our commitment to help victims of crime. Last month in Toronto, I joined with Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day to deliver a two-pronged message.

First, we announced $52 million over four years to increase the availability of services for victims of crime. For example, the money will help expand the resources available to victims who choose

to attend parole hearings; it will help to offset the costs of traveling to sentencing hearings; and it will improve the availability of victims' services in the North.

Secondly, we fulfilled our long-standing commitment to create a Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. The Ombudsman will promote the concerns of victims, and ensure that victims can gain access to federal services and programs. In a moment, I will proudly be announcing with Minister Day who we have chosen to be our Federal Ombudsman.

First, let me say that the establishment of an Ombudsman is based on the belief that Canada's justice system benefits from the participation of victims of crime. I believe it is entirely appropriate that our justice system evolve to better meet the needs of victims. The appointment of a Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime is part of this evolution.

Working together on behalf of victims is the right thing for this Government to do. But preventing other people from becoming victims is even better.

That is why tackling crime is central to our Government's agenda.

Since taking office last year, we have brought forward no fewer than 11 new legislative proposals that will help reduce crime and create safer communities for Canadians.

We have also brought into force Bill C-19, which creates new offences that specifically target street racing—a reckless and dangerous act that all too often kills. Other pieces of legislation now before Parliament propose to get tough with impaired drivers, create minimum sentences for offences involving firearms and raise the age of protection to 16 years.

Working on its own, government can't ease the suffering experienced by victims of crime. Clearly, all citizens must work together to help victims and to prevent crime.

And today, on behalf of all Canadians, I would like to thank the men and women who work with victims of crime. Your contribution makes Canada a safer and more compassionate place. Your efforts should convince us all that it's time to listen and to act.

Now, I would like to ask my colleague Minister Day to join me at the podium to help me name the first Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

As many of you know, on March 16, we announced that we had established an office for the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. This was a promise that this government had made – and we delivered. We conducted a search and reviewed a number of very qualified candidates.

We are pleased today to be able to announce that Steve Sullivan will be Canada's first Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

Many of you know Steve. Steve Sullivan is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime. And he is on the organizing committee of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and today's symposium here in Ottawa.

Steve began working in the victims' rights movement in 1993 with Victims of Violence where he was Director of Research for two years. In 1995, he became the Executive Director of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, and was appointed President in 1998.

Steve has advocated on behalf of individual victims at various stages of the criminal justice system including the corrections system, and has worked with various levels of government for increased victims' rights and services.

Steve has appeared before various government committees examining issues such as parole reform, legislation regarding the protection of children, sentencing reform, DNA evidence and victims' rights.

Steve has done extensive research on victim related issues including access to information, families of unsolved homicide and victims of terrorism. He has delivered training to staff of the National Parole Board and Correctional Service of Canada on victims and taught a course on victims and the criminal justice system at Algonquin College.

Steve has been a long-time advocate for victims, and now, as Ombudsman, he will ensure that victims who in the past had no voice – are now heard.

Congratulations, Steve. Please join us here on the podium.

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